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C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 002835

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/18/2019

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SUBJECT: KARZAI CONFIDENT, CONCILIATORY AT SEPTEMBER 17  
PRESS CONFERENCE ON PROVISIONAL ELECTION RESULTS

Classified By: Classified by Deputy Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone f  
or Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: President Karzai appears to be feeling confident enough about his prospects for re-election that in his September 17 media appearance he set aside his recent bitter edge in comments about the United States. Though he continued to blame the international media for exaggerating reports of electoral fraud, his public comments included positive references to the importance of Afghanistan's strategic relationship with the United States and his personal responsibility to abide by decisions of the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). End Summary.

¶2. (C) In an interview on September 16 with the privately-owned channel Arzu TV (affiliated with Voice of America), Afghan Information and Culture Minister Abdul Karim Khorram had accused governments of Western countries generally, and America specifically, of interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs. He claimed that the United States and the West intend to change the Afghan election results according to our preference and that we have been interfering since the very beginning of the election process. Khorram is known for making inflammatory statements and for his anti-Western stance.

¶3. (C) On September 17, President Hamid Karzai moved his planned evening press conference to 10:30 a.m. His Chief of Staff, Mohammad Daudzai, told us that Karzai did this deliberately to allow a quicker riposte to the statements of his Minister. In his press conference, President Karzai struck an unusually conciliatory tone. When queried about current relations with the West, Karzai specified America in his remarks, stating "relations worsened on some issues, but we have a strategic relationship with America and I and others have a responsibility to continue it. If I become the next president I will...always work to make the relationship with the United States better."

¶4. (SBU) When asked about his views on the ECC supposedly 'having declared most of his votes invalid,' (Note: This was possibly a reference to the EU Observer Mission's September 16 press conference, or an allusion to the ECC-mandated audit/recount. End Note.) Karzai responded "The ECC has total authority to invalidate or validate my votes." The Embassy has been pushing Karzai to make a public statement not only in support of the Independent Elections Commission (IEC), but also the ECC, following the letter of the electoral process. In recent weeks, Karzai has praised the IEC, all of whose Commissioners are Afghans appointed by him. He has simultaneously either criticized or ignored the ECC, headed by three Westerners among a five-person commission. The September 17 statement was by far the strongest statement of support for the ECC Karzai has ever made. Still, Karzai equivocated by answering another question with "I do not believe that massive fraud has taken place, and where fraud did take place, there must be a criminal investigation, and as President, I have a responsibility to act accordingly."

However, I do not think there is as much fraud as the foreign media says there is."

¶5. (C) Comment: President Karzai is magnanimous when he feels confident and defensive when he feels cornered. Thus far in the elections cycle, his emotions have been very much on display. This sudden display of confident good feelings toward the United States and the ECC suggests that Karzai feels he will win in the first round; other reporting suggests he has detected new U.S. support for such an outcome. End Comment.  
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